RAILWAY TIME TABLES.

DEL., LACK. & WESTERN RAILROAD.
Newark and Bloomfield Branch.

CORRESPONDENCE

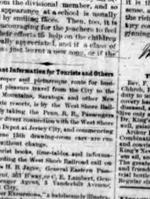
FROM MRS. ASHTON DILKE

SHE TELLS OF HER LIFE AS MEMBER OF LONDON'S SCHOOL BOARD.

She Enjoys It Thoroughly, She Says—Its Duties Are Very Exacting and Leave Very Little Time for Social or Other Relaxation.

Special Correspondence.

LONDON, May 26.—We school board members are elected for a term of three years, and as we have just arrived half way in our present tenure of office I thought it a favorable opportunity a few weeks ago to review the work of the last eighteen months in a speech at my constituents, and generally sift out in my own mind the impressions I have formed. It takes a new member a full year to master the ordinary routine of his work, to realize what he may and what he may not do, and to make himself acquainted with the whole "personnel" of the board officers. I enjoy my work fully as much as I anticipated, and that I look forward to the pleasure of standing again at the next election.



MRS. ASHTON DILKE.

As in the United States the school committees do not exactly correspond to our popularly elected school boards, it may be of interest to give a little sketch of what the duties of a school board member really are. Even in England people are often amusingly vague on the subject, and seem to imagine that attendance at the public meeting of the board held every Thursday afternoon, with an occasional participation in the debate, absorbs the onerous portion of one's functions. As a matter of fact, the best part of both one's time and energy is daily absorbed by the board, and I have found myself obliged to relinquish by degrees not only a large number of my political and lecturing engagements, but also a considerable proportion of my social duties as well.

The really arduous part of one's school board duties undoubtedly consists of attendance at committees. The whole work of the board is divided up among various committees, which meet either weekly or fortnightly in the committee room provided for the purpose in the large and handsome school board office overlooking the Thames Embankment. Every member is supposed to sit on three of these committees, and his is given his choice as to which three he may prefer. I selected for my share the works committee, which has charge of all the building plans and contracts, and which, by the by, is the most unpopular committee with school teachers, which also has charge of all the questions of pensions in office, the sites and the school management committee. This latter committee, which is entrusted all strictly educational questions, as well as the appointment of teachers, is divided up into numerous sub-committees, such as the drawing and pupil teachers, the premises and the physical exercise sub-committees, all of which I sit, and the needlework sub-committee, of which I am chairwoman. So I do not think I shall be guilty of exaggeration if I say that on an average fifteen hours a week, or three hours a day, either of business days and Sundays, are devoted to committee work. Sometimes, when there is a sudden rush of work, I may spend eight hours in the office-block till I reach my board office, passing from room to room, from one committee to another, and filling myself in the interval with cups of cocoa and cutlets cheek while the work is going on. Extra committees are always coming on, and I may member when the map committee will be formed.

Then there are the schools themselves, a very important and a specially interesting part of one's board duties. I am responsible for the schools in Chelsea I am responsible for the personal supervision of nine schools, and so they are scattered over a considerable area, and I am very far away from my own home in Kensington, but it certainly helps to manage the thorough inspection of more than one school in the course of a morning's work, as one or two mornings a week are none, too much for the duties in this department and to the cultivation of friendly relations with the teachers and the managers. Very often, if they are in want of advice or information, the head teachers ask me to call, or other times I drop in unexpectedly, in order to see for myself that everything is going on smoothly.

The head master eagerly explains that he is positively entitled to an extra assistant, while the head mistress begs most urgently assistance to get rid of one she has already got, and whom I arrive at the infants' department I am told a long story of the decline of the playground, in want of order, and the small infants wet their boots by persistently playing in the pools of water which are left by every shower of rain. Many of these little grievances, which, if they had to pass through the various channels of official red tape might take several weeks to rectify, can be settled at once by an order from the divisional member, and on one's appearance at a school is usually hailed by smiling faces. Then, too, it is very encouraging for the teachers to feel that their efforts to help on the children are really appreciated, and if a school or boys has lived, here's now some, or if the little girls display a happy aptitude for Swedish drill, teachers and pupils alike are only too delighted to be put through a performance for my benefit.

I am ready to confess that we are rather proud in London of our school houses. It is always a great pleasure to me to enter across one of our big, handsome red brick buildings, with its gabled roofs and many windows and ample play grounds, right from the midst of some squalid neighborhood. And once inside, when I go over the separate class rooms for every standard, the big central hall for drill and attendance, and the cheerful, airy passages, it is a comfort to know that however shoddy and unsanitary many of the children's homes may be, the best part of their day is spent in the healthiest and happiest surroundings possible. It is wonderful the moral effect that a well built, well lit school has on both teachers and scholars alike. The cleanliness is always perfect, and there is a briskness and smartness about the proceedings which is very encouraging after the listlessness and dreariness which is so often to be observed in an ill ventilated, overcrowded school room.

We have naturally a large amount of trouble to the inspection of schools, and apart from the actual teaching qualifications of the teachers, it is very hard it to be a point of great importance to secure tenants and managers who will take an interest in their pupils outside school hours, and organize games and their swimming clubs and entertainments during the winter months, and who, from the first day they start at the yearly distribution of prizes, a treat to see how very willingly people, the teachers get up quite a little fund for the purpose.

All the preparatory work done in committee has to be reported to the board at its weekly public meeting in form being thrown open to the recommendations of a committee. The most frequently question arises in connection with debate. The most interesting discussions often arise on the amendments, which may be put down by any member, and are often taken in turn. It was in this manner that a motion in favor of free education was carried last winter by a large majority, three years after the passing into the hands of the advocates of this most important boon, and we also by a notice of motion the other day that the duties of a school board member really are. Even in England people are often amusingly vague on the subject, and seem to imagine that attendance at the public meeting of the board held every Thursday afternoon, with an occasional participation in the debate, absorbs the onerous portion of one's functions. As a matter of fact, the best part of both one's time and energy is daily absorbed by the board, and I have found myself obliged to relinquish by degrees not only a large number of my political and lecturing engagements, but also a considerable proportion of my social duties as well.

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